

Learning in Hand



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Creating podcasts has many educational benefits. Students are able to create a product to share with a potentially world-wide audience! The process of putting together an audio recording is extremely valuable and is certainly a cross-curricular experience.

There are four steps to creating a podcast: preproduction, recording, postproduction, and publishing and they are listed below. For step-by-step directions for creating an audio podcast, download my free 34-page booklet [Podcasting for Teachers & Students](#).



Preproduction

Before students even think of stepping up to the microphone, much planning must be done. In fact, I've found in creating the audio podcast [Radio WillowWeb](#) that preproduction takes over three-quarters of the time to produce it. Teachers and students need to keep their audience in mind. *Who will listen to the podcast? Is it everyone in the school? Is it parents? Is it students in another state or another grade level?* Determining who exactly is the audience should help focus the podcast.

The podcast as a series will need a name. Additionally, each episode will need a name. The more descriptive and creative, the better!

In preproduction, you must also decide upon the format for the podcast. *Who will actually be heard in the recording? Should you have a host? What segments do you plan for the show?*

When planning, consider the length of your podcast. This will be based on your content and audience. Podcasts for students should probably be less than 10 minutes. If you have a lot of information, consider dividing it up among multiple episodes.

A way to keep an episode interesting is to use segments. Radio WillowWeb has a host (or pair of hosts) that introduce a variety of segments about the episode's topic. When in preproduction, students choose segments from their [Segment Planning Booklet](#). Segments include Did You Know, Vocabulary Theater, Do It Differently, Poetry Corner, Riddle, Similes to Make You Smile, and Wonderful Website.

If your podcast is involving an entire classroom of students, the teacher should find ways to involve everyone in preproduction. For [Radio WillowWeb](#), some teachers have everyone pair up in class. The pairs all write segments. Then the pairs present the segments to the entire class. The teacher and students then select which segments should be included in the podcast. This way everyone is involved, the podcast gets the best segments, and the recording will be an appropriate length.

After content, segments, and speakers have been decided, it's time to turn the notes into a script. Even experienced podcasters like [Grammar Girl](#) rely on a script to make their podcasts the best they can be.

It's really helpful for podcasters to practice what they are going to say out loud to others.

Radio WillowWeb has adult volunteers take students in the hallway to listen to them practice their scripts. The volunteers can coach students to do better. Students tend to have trouble speaking at an appropriate volume and speed. They will probably need help enunciating too.

Sample ideas and uses for a podcast:

- Weekly classroom news broadcast
- Document a field trip
- Record a class discussion
- Share book reviews
- Conduct interviews
- Review curricular content



Recording

If podcasters have practiced what they are going to say, recording will be a much quicker process. Although you can try using the built-in microphone on a computer, I suggest using a USB headset microphone like the those made by [Logitech](#) or [Plantronics](#). Students then don't have to worry about their distance from the microphone while they read their scripts or notes. If you have more than podcaster speaking at once, the [Snowball](#) or [Yeti](#) are great choices.

Macintosh users will want to use Garageband to record their podcasts. Unfortunately, Garageband is not available for Windows computers. Windows podcasts can use Audacity. It's free and fairly easy to learn. I have made a [15 minute video](#) for teachers to show how to get started with Audacity.

It's best if students record short portions of audio at a time. Students then have less chance of messing up what they intend to say. When the portions are played right after another, the listener won't realize that some things were recorded separately.

Background noise can be distracting to listeners. When recording in a busy school it can be difficult to find a quiet spot, but the effort will be well worth it. A major source of background noise is paper shuffling and touching the microphone or its cord. Fidgety podcasters are encouraged to squeeze stress balls while recording to ensure their hands aren't making noise.

It might sound counterintuitive, but I suggest recording the introduction last for a couple of reasons. First, recording last allows you to introduce exactly what will be in the podcast because it has already been recorded. Second, students have had practice in front of the microphone and are more comfortable. They'll record a much better introduction, and after all, the introduction should hook the listeners!



Postproduction

After recording, it's time to edit the audio. You may not have recorded the audio in order, so the first priority is to make sure all audio is arranged properly. Also, clips can be trimmed to delete any unnecessary pauses or interruptions.

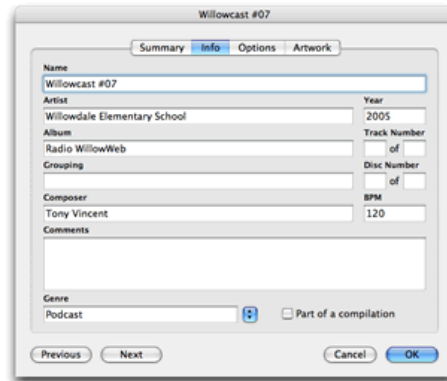
Music and sound effects can be added in postproduction. If you're using a Mac and GarageBand, it's easy for student to mix the available loops of music. Audacity users cannot compose music within the software. If you use music from the web, be sure it is "podsafe." Podsafes music is the term for music that can be legally used in a podcast and freely distributed online for others to download. There's actually so much podsafes music online, that you can spend hours sifting through it. Here are some sites for podsafes music:

- [The Free Sound Project](#)
- [SoundSnap](#)
- [Royalty Free Music](#)
- [Flash Kit - Sound FX](#)
- [Podcast Bumper Music](#)
- [fOUR bEES Free Media](#)
- [Podsafes Audio](#)
- [Mutopia](#)
- [ACIDplanet](#) offers a free 8-pack of loops each Friday.

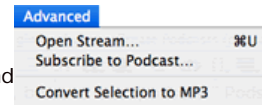
I like to download and save the podsafes music I like on a flash drive. When it's time to create a podcast, I have the music readily available. Don't have Garageband and want students to create their own music? Check out [Myna](#), it's free and runs right in your web browser.

Once the podcast sounds just the way you want it, it's time to send it to iTunes. You can do this from the *File* menu in GarageBand, or you can export to WAV in Audacity and then open

the exported file in iTunes. Now you select the file you imported in iTunes and select *Get Info* from the *File* menu. Complete the fields. It's best to make sure this information is consistent in each podcast produced.



Once you have the fields completed the way you want them, then click OK. Next, choose "Convert Selection to MP3" from the *Advanced* menu. Finally, select the file in the iTunes list and drag and drop it onto the computer's desktop. Now your MP3 file is there, ready for publishing!



For detailed step-by-step directions for post-production, read the [Podcasting for Teachers & Students](#) PDF.



Publishing

Publishing is perhaps the most technical part of the entire process. A podcast has three components that need to be online: the media file, web page, and web feed. There are a variety of options and methods to get the three components online.

Your school might already have a way for your to publish your podcast. If not, one way you can publish is using a publishing service like [Podomatic](#) (free) or [Libsyn](#) (\$6-\$30 monthly). [Posterous](#) is an excellent choice for audio-only podcasts since it allows simple publishing through email. Another free [method](#) of publishing involves using Blogger and Feedburner.

After getting your podcast published, you should [submit](#) the web address of your web feed to iTunes and other podcast directories. After submitting your podcast to iTunes, it takes about a week for it show up in searches in the iTunes Store.

Learn how to link to your podcast in iTunes so web visitors can easily subscribe by viewing [Learning in Hand Podcast #15](#).

More about podcasting...

- Read Learning in Hand Blog posts tagged [podcasting](#).
- Want to see podcasting in action is a classroom? [Watch](#) the students of Room 208 in Maine show you how they produced their weekly podcast.



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